

The Love

by Daroneasa

Category: Animorphs

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 1999-06-17 09:00:00

Updated: 1999-06-17 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 10:23:49

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 17,326

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Sequel to the Promise. Don't read this if you didn't like the Promise, 'kay? It's sad.

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Prologue

Jiseka set his jaw firmly, trying to stay composed and suppress his outrage at the young female Hork-Bajir thinker standing before him, a smirk of triumph on her face. She looked on him, thinking him a traitor, and now he would be punished. He, of all people! He had devoted his life to protecting the galaxy from the Andalite tyranny, at times when it seemed impossible, fighting as Daroneasa's second. And always knowing deep down that most of the Andalites were not evil, just arrogant, and well meaning. He knew, unlike these young rebels that stood and judged him, what the real battle was. They could only think of overthrowing the reign of the Andalites, before they drove their human companions to the same arrogant way of thinking themselves better than all. True, Andalites considered the humans the only species that could ever match them in greatness, so they were their equals, as well as allies. All of the other Andalite allies were treated as peasants, with the Andalites as the kindly nobles who gave bread to those poor wretches, too stupid and primitive to dream of anything better. Only a small, insignificant group stood against them, an organization with less than a thousand members, and shrinking, for the humans and Andalites tracked them down and tried them for treason against the Federal Galaxy. The Andalites were fools, drunk with their own pride, and would not be won by the terrorist violence that Nissa, who herself was much like the Andalites in her pride, loved. She wanted to destroy the Federal Galaxy, returning it to the days before the yeerks, a time which he remembered only too well, and none of them knew. It is sad really, that they never knew peace, the oppression from the yeerks smoothly passed on to the Andalites. "But I have not known peace either! Ah, Mother sky, Father deep, where is Daroneasa at such a time? Never

have we needed her more!" he thought, blinking back tears. "Are you weeping for your terrible treachery, Jiseka?" asked Nissa, but not in her usual, calm and deliberate manner. She wanted him dead. He had spoiled her great plans. Even though many humans would have lost their lives, it was a necessary evil. "I'm at war. The end WILL justify the means!" she told herself, not for the first time. Jiseka was a fool for interfering. "No, Nissa. We fight to protect the galaxy, not to kill innocent people. It is you who are the traitor. I cry because I know my time has come and I wish that I could have seen..." "Quiet! Traitors shall not speak her name!" Nissa hissed. Jiseka was taken aback, his mouth hanging open in shock. He shook his head angrily, his brown hair, now streaked with gray, falling into his eyes. "You little fool! I had known her before she was great, before you or any of your friends here were even thought about, save for Ereka! I fought along her side for seventy years, I loved her, and I have more right to speak her name than any of you! She would have done the same if she was here!" Nissa slashed him, a deep gash under his right eye with her puny blades, growling a low menacing growl and replying in her human-like silky voice. "You're the fool! And now you will die, traitor!" She nodded to the large Hork-Bajir thinker that held him down. He was young as well, with cool black eyes and long dark hair, and so different from Jiseka, who had always been small. Gihash was even more fanatical than Nissa. He not only wished to destroy the Andalite empire, but to destroy the Andalite race. But he regarded Jiseka with a look of pity and placed his wrist blade under his throat. "Ah, Daroneasa, I hope you are still somewhere so that you may stop this madness, and if you are not, I will know soon. I wish I could have held you in my eyes just one more time. These little ones are foolish, they don't see..." And then Jiseka could think no more, as Gihash slit his throat in one quick movement. Nissa smiled. "And as this is done, it shall be with all traitors." She whirled on her heels, walking away from the bloody shell that had been her teacher and friend.

Chapter 1 Skrit Na City, USA 2030 A.D

"Heather, for god's sake, slow down! You're acting like a child, not an Aristh!" Desmond laughed, tearing after his cousin. "Why would he care if I run?" she shouted back, picking up pace, even though she knew that Desmond, who was nearly twenty one years old, could outrun her any time he wished. But he was clumsy, and stumbled over several Iskroot in his path. "Sorry!" he said, half turning. < I shall never understand you humans. Or your evolution. You have to turn your body to see behind you. And if your walking forwards and do this, it's quite possible that... > Desmond smacked into a wall. < See? I told you so. Have you broken that nose of yours? > Meuik tried to sound composed and serious, but in truth, she was shaking with silent Andalite laughter as she pulled Desmond to his feet. Heather came back and grinned. < Ah, you, running like a wild creature through the streets! You're an Aristh of the Andalite and Human army, you shouldn't be making a fool of yourself, Heather! > Meuik scolded with a hint of amusement. Meuik was the oldest of the trio, but not by more than a couple of years. But since she had more experience, she was the one who was in charge, even if the three young cadets were on vacation. "Yes, mother." Heather said, grinning. Meuik searched about with her stalk eyes and noticed something going on down the alley they were in. Sounded like a fight to her, but she couldn't be sure in this rough city. One didn't interfere unless they were certain that they knew what they were getting into. She didn't want to end up in a fight with some alien ten times larger than herself. But the humans

were always more certain. "Whoa, sounds bad, lets go see what's going on." Heather suggested, starting into the alley. Meuik and Desmond followed wearily, with some apprehension. Heather could be more reckless than any Aristh should be at times, but she was smart enough to know that she shouldn't just burst into a fight. As the trio drew closer, they saw a tall figure with long black hair, backing out of a doorway, and then recognized it to be a Hork-Bajir thinker. He didn't see them yet, and they stayed hidden behind a garbage dumpster. "Nissa, this is not wise, to do this. What if the Andalites find him? They will know, they'll know!" " Know what? We're moving from this place. If Jiseka would betray us once, does it not sound logical that he could have given our location to the Andalites or the humans? If the Andalites find him here, we will be gone and they'll have a dead trail, which will buy us much needed time." "It just seems so wrong. He was a hero..." Said the male, his voice sorrowful. Meuik could see them dragging a body, another Hork-Bajir thinker, his face in a death mask, and she knew without explanation what must have happened to this poor creature. And she knew the female, Nissa. She, next to Daroneasa and Jiseka, was the most wanted creatures in the entire galaxy, a cold criminal who would bring down the Federal Galaxy's order which her kind had worked so hard to achieve. She happened to look at Desmond, his face white and set with unspeakable horror and sorrow. But why would he care about this criminal? The two hauled his body into the dumpster than quickly disappeared inside the door they had come from, arguing angrily until she could hear their voices no more. "Oh no..." Desmond muttered, looking at the body. " What? Why do you care about this criminal?" Heather asked, but even her face showed pity. Meuik pulled out her radio and began to signal for the base. It would take a few minutes until she could get an answer, and at least ten until they would arrive. < Desmond, don't touch it. It's a vile traitor, not some friend of yours! > Meuik gasped as he closed the purple eyes, staring at nothing. " Quiet, Meuik. For once, you are wrong." He said quietly. Meuik looked offended and put away her communicator. < They said they're coming and to stay where we were and don't let anything happen to the body. > she said quietly, walking over to where her friends stood. < Desmond, what is it that you feel for this...creature? > she said in contempt. She hated Hork-Bajir, period. Especially the so-called 'thinkers' who were the very root of all trouble in the Federation. Indeed, they had always attempted to thwart the Andalites' noble intentions to save the galaxy. Hork-Bajir, of all the species, should feel the most grateful to the Andalites and should have despised the Yeerks! And they might have, if not for these thinkers. She could stand the normal ones. They were ugly and frightening, but timid and easy to manipulate. They did what they were told, and followed like sheep. But these thinkers were not like their cousins. They were rebellious, hating any authority but their own, refusing the Federal Galaxy, causing the entire K'glique war with those vile insects and then the rebellion. But, thankfully, they were now all but extinct. For sure, Daroneasa was dead, and now Jiseka. Those two and five others were the only others known to be free. Four more adults, and one child. "We should kill these scum and be rid of them once and for all!" she thought, looking angrily on the dead Hork-Bajir. Had she been a member of the council, she would have had the thinkers killed when they first knew of the rebellion. There had been a few hundred then, but they had been hunted down and brought to Andalite justice. Desmond looked at her, seeming to read her thoughts. "Meuik, you don't know anything about them..." he began, but was cut short by the sound of an Andalite fighter gliding down. A warrior came towards them, and several others rushed to another alley, no doubt the second door to

the rebels' base. < Greetings, Arisths. What have you found here? Jiseka? I have fought that scum tail to blade, and I would know his vile face anywhere! > He peered at Jiseka's body and looked satisfied and evil. < Good work, you three. You've perhaps led us to the main hideout, maybe it will be you who will be remembered as the ones who crushed the thinkers and their treason! > Meuik looked proud, but not Desmond. Heather remained indifferent, not knowing what to think. Her father had always spoken well of the Hork-Bajir, telling her stories of his friends, Jara Hamee, Ket Halpak, and their daughter Toby Hamee, who had been a seer, as smart as any thinker. The three were long dead. < Do you think you can watch this door for any who might try to escape? > he asked Meuik. < It would be an honor, sir. > She said, her eyes shining. The old soldier turned and went to join his team. "Oh, what have we done..." Desmond muttered. Meuik did not hear him. She was too caught up in her silly dreams of glory. A piercing scream inside, shouting, the sounds of battle. Heather covered her ears and Desmond began to cry. Meuik was perplexed at the two of them, but she knew that humans were more sensitive to some things than Andalites. Suddenly, the door was thrust open, and Meuik sprang forward, ready for battle. She was met by a human she did not know, but he seemed to flicker, like a hologram, his face set with horror and grim fear. He looked at the Andalite before him, and lost control completely, revealing his dog-like android body. < CHEE! > Meuik hissed with fury, but she dared not attack. No Andalite could hope to win against a chee. He guarded the Hork-Bajir thinker child, who was crying in his arms, clutching to him, true fear on her small face. < Put that thing down, and face me, you coward! > Meuik said angrily, but she was only bluffing. and the chee knew that. He looked at Heather and Desmond and then over at Jiseka's body. His hologram flickered on, showing his face stricken with horror and sadness. Then he just shoved past them and out in the street, where he and the child would blend away into the crowd with his hologram. < You didn't even try to stop them! > Raged Meuik. "Stop a chee? Meuik, don't be an idiot!" Heather said angrily. Meuik knew she was right and turned to the door in time to be run over by the large Hork-Bajir who had been with Nissa. He stopped, looking surprised and angry, but only laughed at Meuik, lying unconscious against a wall, and helped Nissa out. "That Andalite child is lucky she is unconscious and is not trying to fight me. I would surly have killed her!" he said to Nissa and grinned at the humans. Desmond grabbed his shredder. "Your not going anywhere, you scum!" Nissa spat at him and grimaced. "Poor stupid human fed the Andalite lies!" she said with a mixture of disgust and pity. "I know not your intentions or crimes, only what you did to my friend Jiseka!" he said, setting his gun to maximum. "Friend? You see! I knew he'd betrayed our location!!" Nissa screamed, furious. The Andalites burst through the door, but quick as lightning, Nissa had hold of Heather and the male held Desmond. "One step and I'll kill them, Andalite hruthins!" She screamed, and they began to back away. Desmond could see a dying Hork-Bajir female behind them, no doubt cut down trying to escape. She was crying out to Nissa, begging to know if the Chee had saved the Hork-Bajir child. "Yes, yes, Paki, yes. She is safe with Ereka!" She shouted back to the poor Hork-Bajir thinker, moaning in pain. An Andalite kicked her with his hoof and laughed, angry at the hold up. Nissa shot him where he stood, before the Andalites could think. "Now, put your weapons down!" she told the stunned warriors. They set their guns down obediently and then backed away. Nissa grinned and laughed. "You fools should have taken your chances in killing these two." She shot the group and they disintegrated, their faces frozen with horror. Heather screamed and Meuik began to awaken as the Hork-Bajir dragged

them away. "You are too loud!" Nissa said coldly, and set her gun on stun, and shot both of them. "This will keep them out until we get there." She told Gihash. Gihash nodded and they disappeared in the crowd, leaving no one but the half-conscious Meuik, the dying Paki, and the corpse of Jiseka in the alley.

Chapter 2

Desmond awoke, his head throbbing in pain. "oh man..." he groaned, opening his eyes to look around. "AHHHHHH!!!" EreK turned his hologram on and looked amused. "Morning, sunshine." he laughed. Desmond didn't appreciate the joke, he only grumbled and looked over to his friend Heather, who was still asleep. But the young Hork-Bajir had crawled up against her and was snoring. Desmond laughed and shook his friend gently. "Wha...?" she turned away from him and tried to go back to sleep. "Nothing, but you oughta look at your new friend here." he laughed. "What the heck are you talking about..." She looked down and saw the Hork-Bajir, but she didn't have the reaction Desmond had hoped for. She only shrugged and curled up again. Desmond sighed and looked about. Nissa and Gihash were standing on the other side of the large room, arguing. The Chee who called himself 'EreK' was standing up now. "Nissa, the humans are awake. Well, one of them, at least." "Good!" she practically lept across the room. Desmond looked up at her smiling, almost humanoid face and realized that she wasn't a thinker at all, or if she was, she was only half thinker. She was part human! He should have figured it out before. She had a human voice, not the low pitched melodic voice of a female Hork-Bajir. Hers was high and a bit annoying. "Why did you capture us?" "Why? Well, isn't it obvious? We were in the middle of a battle, and you Arisths provided perfect hostages. If you hadn't been one of theirs, the Andalites wouldn't have cared!" She smiled and helped him up. He realized he was a bit taller than her, and her blades were practically non-existent. Only two small ones on her wrists. She had a small, flesh colored beak, and no horns at all. No tail, five fingered hands, and only small, kitten-like claws. She wore human cloths, like the other thinkers. Her eyes were a deep purple, like Jiseka's, a common characteristic in thinkers. They didn't have red eyes like their cousins, or if they did, only their iris was red. Although she seemed pleasant enough, Desmond didn't like her from the start. Something about her made him feel uneasy. But maybe it was just the fact that she had decimated an entire legion of Andalites and that he was her prisoner. That doesn't leave good first impressions on a person. "I am terribly sorry. I suppose you would like to rest. I have to tend to some friends who were wounded. EreK here will answer any questions you may have." She smiled and began to turn, but Desmond stopped her angrily. "What about Meuik?" he said, his voice hard and gruff. "The Andalite child?" asked Gihash, his eyes flashing with hatred. "I will send someone to find her and return her here. Gihash?" "No problem." he grinned, showing his tiny pointed teeth. "Alive and unharmed." Desmond warned. Gihash sighed a bit and then left. "Yes, of course. I will return soon." Desmond looked over at EreK, apparently a middle aged man, but he knew who and what he really was. The android smiled ruefully, knowing that this was the son of the Animorph leader, Jake. Desmond finally spoke, his voice heavy with anger and frustration. "What's going to happen to us?" "Ah, Nissa will not harm you unless you turn against her. She is not as terrible as she seems, nor as polite as she was just now. She must want something of you two. I know there is a secret mission coming up, probably another attempt to breach the bridge between dimensions. We know now that Daroneasa could be in an alternate

dimension. There are two, one created by Tala Jamree, a Hork-Bajir seer, and the other created by an Andalite, a shadow of our universe thirty years ago. Although it is not a true dimension. More of a Sario Rip effect. It is imperative to find out which, because in less than a month, the mirror dimension will collapse. We have learned that she is in the mirror or shadow dimension. Whatever you want to call it. We believe that she may not remember who she is." The chee looked troubled then shook his head impatiently. Desmond looked on in confusion then shrugged it off. "Nissa... is she part human or something?" Desmond ventured shyly. "Oh yes, that's why she doesn't want to bring down the humans along with the Andalites. She..." "Erek?" the little Hork-Bajir had awakened and was sitting upright, blinking at the bright light. "Yes?" She shifted from one foot to another nervously and the Chee took the hint. "Okay, Ajani, lets go." Heather woke up suddenly at the feeling that she was cold. She watched Ajani move away, then sat up. Ajani looked back at her and smiled, showing her tiny teeth. "Bye-bye lady." she said, and scampered after Erek. They waited for no one silently for about ten minutes, but finally heard footsteps. "Hey, you two!" A kid trotted towards them. He was human, about their age, maybe a bit younger. He wore the simple street cloths that the rebels used, and a small gold necklace in the shape of a triangle. "Nissa said you guys might be hungry. Follow me." Erek came back about that time and followed them to a small room with a few freezers and other cooking things. "This is Tommy. Nissa took him in a while back. He's a nice enough kid" Erek whispered quietly so that Tommy couldn't hear. "Tommy is a product of Andalite technology and bioengineering, like Nissa. He has strange powers that he cannot control. He may be a bit dangerous. Nissa found him a year ago, being beat up by a human and some Andalites. She saved him, and got him to join our cause." Desmond sat down at a table next to Erek. " You guys wait here. Nissa will be back to brief you guys, okay?" Desmond nodded and waited. "This shall prove interesting." muttered Heather.

Chapter 3

Meuik staggered to her feet and looked around. A dead Hork-Bajir thinker a few feet away. No trace of the Andalites or her friends. She drew a deep breath, trying to decide what to do. The rebels had Desmond and Heather, no doubt. They had a chee with them. And they were loose. She knew she could do very little without some help. She trotted out into the street, searching for a transport. An Iskroot hover craft was the first to appear, and after a bit of bargaining, Meuik traded an old, broken communicator for a ride to the nearest Andalite Base. As she arrived, the Iskroot tried to bargain for her shredder gun as well, but to no avail. Meuik resented the Iskroot. There were rumors that they had once been very similar to the yeerks and were actually parasites. But the Iskroot kept their private lives well guarded, so no one knew. Meuik trotted through the building, towards the head commander's quarters. < What are you doing, girl? > asked a warrior at the entrance. < Rebels have captured two Arisths and escaped! > < Ha! Blaire, Ryan, go with her to find her friends. You know that the Prince cannot be bothered with a couple of Arisths. Find them quickly. > Meuik began to object, but decided against it. She nodded to Blair and Ryan. They were both siblings of Heather. Ryan was a full warrior. This was foolish, though. She wished she could get past the guard, but she would be punished for violating commands, and from the look of him, Blair wouldn't help her in doing that. And she knew Ryan wouldn't. < Come on. Lets see if we can track them. > Blaire entered Desmond's and Heather's personal code into the

tracker. "They are approximately half a mile from here." They walked outside, following the blips on the screen. "Hey! I lost them!" < The rebels would have a blocking device. We'll have to go back and get a military class tracker... > "Wait! Wait! Look!" Ryan pointed to a cloaked Hork-Bajir, walking stealthily along a street, near the alley. The thinker looked around and Meuik noticed a strand of black hair that fell from his cloak. < That's one of them! Lets get him! > Meuik started to charge, but Ryan grabbed her. "Don't be a fool. We'll just follow him." The three began after Gihash and were so preoccupied, they didn't notice that they themselves were being followed.

Chapter 4

Gihash gave up his search after half an hour and traveled back to the base. He was glad he didn't have to deal with the little Andalite brat. In his opinion, Nissa shouldn't be associating with these Arisths anyway. Why would they ever help them? But Nissa knew more than he did, so he kept quiet. Besides, he would never do anything other than Nissa commanded. She was his only joy. He wished she'd return all his love for her. He'd do anything she said. He'd killed his own best friend, Jiseka, for her. Maybe, one day, she would call him love. But not today. As he returned, Nissa approached him, angry. "Did you find her?" Nissa asked as he slipped in the door. "No, she went to the base, I guess." "Well, they'll have trackers. We need to get this thing going now or it might be too late." Gihash nodded. He was looking forward to a mission. Perhaps he would see battle. His eyes danced at the idea of war. Full out war. Daroneasa would surly return and lead them to victory and destroy the Andalites. He followed Nissa into a room filled with electronic equipment. Erek the Chee and Ajani were at the controls. "Why is she working the controls?" Nissa asked in contempt. She had little love for Ajani. She was only a clone of Daroneasa, a copy. She would be disposed of when Daroneasa returned, Nissa would make sure of that. "Nissa, Ajani is smart enough to use a simple computer. Besides, it's a game." "We are preparing for war and she is playing games? I think not. Find something else for her to do." Erek looked angry for a moment. Of course. He would hate her even more when Ajani was gone, but he could do nothing. He was just a stupid Chee, without the power to fight. He was only useful in technology and thinking. He would be useless in battle. Erek sighed and sent Ajani to another room. "Now, where are the humans and Tommy? We need to brief them." "They're coming." Nissa looked angrily at him. Erek despised her to begin with, and he wouldn't help her more than he had to unless it benefited Ajani. Tommy, Desmond, and Heather joined the rebels. Nissa was brief in her apologies again and made a suitable explanation on the whereabouts of Meuik. "Now, the reason I decided I need you is simply because you are both children of the Animorphs. That could come in handy if we have some...undesirable misunderstandings within the shadow realm. The plan is simply for us to go to the shadow realm and find Daroneasa. Any interruption in the timeline will be quite simple to detect. We should be able to find her, if she is there, in less than a week, which happens to be all the time we have. The shadow realm is collapsing, so we don't have as much time there. Do you understand?" Heather and Desmond nodded slowly, both feeling uneasy about Nissa. "Alright then, lets move." Erek typed furiously on a keyboard and a round porthole appeared. "Every second it moves a mile. It'd be best if you all jumped together." Desmond didn't quite understand what he meant, but he took his position next to Heather, Tommy, Gihash and Nissa. "On the count of three...." Nissa announced.

"One...two...three!" "Bonzi!" Heather screamed, leaping in first. Desmond held his breath and jumped, like he was jumping into deep water. Erek watched them disappear and turned back to his keyboard. "Thank the stars she's not going to be around for a while." he breathed, once again typing furiously. He didn't notice Meuik, Ryan and Blair, running into the porthole. And he didn't notice what leaped after them either as he closed it. He turned in his chair and sighed. "Erek, is Nissa gone?" Ajani looked at the place where the porthole had been. "Only for a little while." he smiled. "What's that?" She pointed to a small badge next to the place where the porthole had been. A circle within a circle with several stars, symbolizing each planet in the federation. The symbol of an Andalite warrior. "Oh man, we are in deep sh..." "Poop." Ajani corrected gently. Erek was too weak to smile. He'd messed up big, and now they really did have trouble. And with his own secret mission coming up, trouble was the last thing he needed.

Chapter 5

Denise walked through the food court with about as much care as a cat. She was always laid back, and she didn't really seem to care. Marco and Jake smiled at each other and approached her. You see, she was the best video game player in the school, and Marco had just made a simple bet. A bet that said he'd pay Jake twenty bucks if he could beat Denise at a game of "Space Invaders" Just two normal boys and a normal girl. She joined the line to the Sonic and glanced at Jake out of the corner of her eye. "Hey...um...wanna play a game of 'space invaders'? I'll pay." he offered shyly. She smiled and laughed. "Tomorrow, Jake, maybe. I have to get going after I get some dinner. I haven't eaten all day." He and Marco looked a bit disappointed. "Well, we're bored. We'll hang with..." "Denise!" Tobias jogged towards the three, smiling. "Hello Tobias." Denise said, grabbing her hamburger and Dr. Pepper. "Wanna sip?" She offered, holding it out to her boyfriend. (oh yeah baby!;)) "Why, thank you!" Marco exclaimed, grabbing it from her. "Hey!" Rachel, who had just showed up along with Cassie, smacked Marco in the head as he took a giant gulp of Denise's drink. "Guys are so rude sometimes." Rachel smiled at Denise. A fake smile. She hated Denise, but she wasn't gonna make an ass out of herself by showing it. Marco spit the drink out in surprise, all over Tobias. "Jeez!" He protested. Denise grabbed what was left of her drink from Marco. "Well, Tobias, you got some whether you wanted it or not." She smiled, turning towards the door. The five companions followed her. Denise had an air of confidence, always sure of herself, which was part of the reason that Rachel hated her. She seemed to be perfect, not really good looking, but she had that kind of leader personality that everyone loved. Like Jake, except that she was different. Not the same kind of leader. Jake lacked her confidence. She had the deliberate personality of a serial killer. She was very smart, she didn't let her emotions cloud her judgement. She didn't like to fight, but she did when necessary. Unlike Rachel, she hated battle. Rachel liked battle because she thought it was fun. Denise was, of course, not a serial killer. She was kind and caring, like Cassie, but she knew when she could and could not help, and didn't fret too much when something was out of her power. She had learned to be able to adapt. Although she had a keen way of knowing when something was a bad idea, she ignored her instincts today. She needed to get home before her foster parents hit the roof. She thought nothing of walking through the abandoned construction site. The others followed, talking and laughing. "Hey, check it out." Denise said, pointing to an approaching light. "Woah!" Marco cried in

surprise as an egg shaped ship swooped over their heads. "Andalite fighter!" Denise whispered, wondering how she knew before the words even left her mouth. The others didn't hear. An image of a blue alien, with four hooves and a deadly tail and stalk eyes flashed in her mind. She shook away the images, making her way to the ship, the others following behind her, hanging back, afraid. The Andalite stumbled from the ship. Her breath stopped. De ja vu hit her, but how? She felt a hand in hers. Tobias. The Andalite told them of the Yeerks, gave them the morphing power. Denise took it calmly, she thought that this was weird never hit her. She looked up at the sky. Bug fighters, she thought, once again bewildered at this knowledge. < Run! > The Andalite warned. The others, save she and Tobias, ran. "Good luck." she said quietly to him, knowing that he would die. < You too, Daroneasa. > His eyes smiled. She didn't even think that he hadn't used her name until she backed away. The sense of self-preservation taking over, she grabbed Tobias and ran, half carrying him. The six teenagers cowered behind a wall, watching the horror before them. "Visser Three..." Denise spat as another Andalite stepped from the ship. "What?" Jake asked, looking at her curiously. "Nothing." She whispered. The fight was short. The others turned away from the gruesome sight, Jake leaped forward, trying to help. But nothing could save Prince Elfangor. "Don't be a fool!" Denise hissed, grabbing Jake. Denise watched the Visser toy with Elfangor, like a cat and a mouse. Her blood boiled with rage. She didn't like these Andalites, for some reason, but she did like this one. He had called her Daroneasa, a name that suited her more than 'Denise'. A name she knew somehow. The others looked away as the Visser devoured helpless Elfangor. Denise watched through tears of anger. "Someday that yeerk will die." She growled. But then, from the shadows, the strange laughter as the Visser killed poor Elfangor, the laughter of Hork-Bajir, that she somehow also knew. The Andalite had explained the Hork-Bajir to them, but she needed no explanation. She KNEW them. She knew about their war, she knew about their leader, Dak Hamee, and how they were created and... her mind drew a blank where she knew she needed info the most.

In the weeks following Elfangor's death, Denise talked a bit with the others, even went to their meetings. She helped Tobias when he got stuck in morph as much as possible, but she was not one of them. Jake, as leader, worried that she could be a controller, due to her complete lack of interest in their missions or being one of them, but he could do nothing. Denise grew further and further apart from Tobias and the Animorphs, and finally broke off completely. She moved to another state, but she still found the yeerks, and had her own battles. The Animorphs slowly forgot that she even existed.

Chapter 6

Denise smiled to a few old friends as she slid some books into her new locker. She hadn't seen any of the Animorphs yet. With those dangerous missions, she feared that one or more of them were dead. She herself had a scar over her eye from a battle where she had demorphed too soon. She had managed to destroy the Hork-Bajir she fought, but he got a good blow in on her. She, being a foster kid, had been moved all over the country in the past two years, and had finally, once again, ended up in her old town. "Oh! Denise!" Marco looked at her utterly surprised. He had figured, since she operated alone, that SHE would be the one who had died by now. "Hey Marco. I'm back." She smiled, slamming her locker shut. He looked at her with some caution. "Uh...we're having a meeting tonight. I want you to

come, if you can. I know you aren't so hip on being in the group, but we need your help with a project. Wildlife conservation and stuff." She nodded. Talking this way, giving hints through normal speech, was nothing new to her for some reason. "Yes. Please give me an update when I get there." "Oh, sure. Lots of stuff has happened." Rachel noticed the two walking down the hall and growled. She didn't trust Denise now. She could be a yeerk spy or anything. She refused to join the group, selfishly putting her safety first. She claimed that she could operate on her own better, but Rachel didn't believe that. She assumed that Denise was scared. And that gave her indescribable satisfaction. "Hello, Denise. Welcome back." She said, her voice cold and her smile false. "Hey." Denise was about as excited to see her. She knew the Animorphs no longer trusted her. They hadn't to start with. It would take a very long time to gain their support again, and a strong will to keep from joining them. She would fight alongside them, but she was not one of them. She was the lone Animorph, the rebel. And she always would be.

"Okay, Denise, time to fill you in." "Hold it, hold it!" Rachel protested. "What if she's a controller? You gonna let her know all of our secrets so she can tell Visser Three." "If she was a controller, we'd be dead already!" Cassie argued. "Look, I know. But Cassie is right. Oh, by the way, Ax, is Erek going to come?" < I don't know. > "Erek?" Denise asked, the name sounding familiar. The Animorphs told her about the Chee, the free Hork-Bajir, and David, the Animorph who had turned on them and who had to be destroyed. Denise seemed very interested in the Hork-Bajir especially. This alarmed Rachel and Marco, because one reason she might want to know was that she may be planning to lead Visser Three to them. < Prince Jake, > Ax whispered in private thought-speech, < I do not trust her. She keeps looking at me like she's afraid or angry with me. I suspect she's either a Yeerk or something else entirely non-human. But she's not a trustworthy ally. If we ally with her, we must be cautious and... > Ax looked up to see Erek coming in. "Hey, the gang's all here." He smiled, looking at Denise. Jake had informed him of the situation. "Okay, here's the deal. Earlier today, Marco found this drawing. It's an Andalite. We need Erek to tell us about this person who drew it." Denise looked at the drawing Jake had handed her. "Nimue. She's a friend of mine. Amazing. It's Elfangor!" She smiled to herself, that same sense of the future hitting her. Nimue was more than the Valedictorian of their small High School, she suspected. She passed the drawing to Erek. He studied it for a minute, staring at the signature in the corner. "Huh. Visser Thirteen has this person as a host, last time I checked. But why would any yeerk draw this, and then lose it?" "A trap." Denise suggested. "Maybe. We oughta investigate." Jake looked at Denise for a second. "Do you have any bird of prey morphs?" Denise shook her head. She had acquired a tiger, some bugs, a rat, a German Shepherd, and a cat. Cassie had a chicken hawk, but that was it. Denise didn't mind. She acquired the bird quickly. "Okay, here's the plan. We go investigate tomorrow. It's getting late. Get home and get some sleep, guys. Jake walked next to Ax as he headed across Cassie's field. < My prince, this Denise reminds me of someone. She is too deliberate to be a human. She's cold. She sounds like a yeerk, but, yet, if she were, we would have all been captured by now. > Jake nodded, exhaling deeply into the warm summer air. He looked at the stars above him. No moon tonight. The stars shone with radiance in a black sky. "Could she be something else?" < Only one other species has that personality. And I would rather face the yeerks than them. >

"Who?" Jake asked, feeling a chill in his spine. < The Hork-Bajir thinkers. > "Oh. The seers, like Dak and Toby Hamee, you mean?" Ax shook his head in a very human gesture. < No. They are just very intelligent Hork-Bajir. A stray gene, probably a throw back from when the Arn first created the Hork-Bajir. Originally, they were smaller, smarter, more....human, I guess. It is said the Arn based some thinker DNA on humans. So, they were Also, more violent, less suited to trees. Most were destroyed by the Arn, so that more, improved Hork-Bajir could be created. But many escaped. They are the thinkers. They caused our loss to the Hork-Bajir world, I believe. They are not to be trusted. Denise acts like one of them. One in particular, who was believed to be the last female. Daroneasa. I would be cautious, but mention that name, watch her reaction. She could have had the morphing power before she met Elfangor. That may be a human morph. Or a hologram. You saw how quick she morphed that bird when she left. Too fast for current technology. > Jake nodded, stopping as they approached the road. "I will. See ya later." < Good evening, Prince Jake. > Ax said, turning towards the woods. "Don't call me 'Prince!'" Jake laughed as Ax trotted away.

Denise slept restlessly in her room. Her dreams were flooded with terrible images. Hork-Bajir, but not the same. Thinkers. Herself, as one of them, leading her people, in a battle against the Andalites. Something told her this was a war in the future. But how? Then, Ereks's face, swearing to keep some secret for her. Herself, crying over the remains of a building, and a detached android arm. Ereks's. The building was a base and she mourned another death...but she could not remember... Flash! She was in a small room, strapped to a table. Some white, round device lay next to her. A creature, an Andalite she thought, stood not far away. < You are now human. You will not remember this. You will live in the past, leading a normal human life. It is the only way I can save you from death... > Denise sat up in bed, letting out a cry of fright. She was covered in a cold sweat. Tears streamed down her face, the truth finally showing its ugly head. Her heart knew, no matter what sounded logical to her mind, that she was that Thinker, Daroneasa. She got up from her bed and walked to the window. Her mind's eye saw a starmap from Earth. "And here is our star, Daroneasa..." She shook her head in confusion. The voice of someone who she had loved, she was sure, but even now that she knew who and what she was, the past was faded. She looked at the star indicated. A reddish star that shone with bright intensity. Her star. His star also. Whoever he was. She needed to think. She needed fresh air. She had lied about a few things to the Animorphs. She had an owl morph she hadn't mentioned, and, even though it would rain soon by the way she saw the clouds to the west approaching. She knew she needed to feel the cool night air beneath her wings. As always, the changes were quick, like liquid. Advanced morphing technology, her mind told her. She was somewhere, lost in the past. She was a nothlit, a person trapped in morph, but...Her memories were sparse, but she remembered one thing.. < If she somehow acquires a different form of morphing power, say, from an escafil device, she could become a Hork-Bajir thinker again... > She smiled to herself. It was worth a shot. She demorphed again, stepping back with dizziness that came from morphing too quickly. The changes this time came slowly. Her dark hair sprouted out longer, turning a sunny blond, her eyes turning from green to blue, enlarging. Her mouth hardened and stretched into a small green beak. Her skin darkened to a chocolate brown, her head and elbows and wrists and knees and ankles all sprouted greenish colored blades, which, she knew, could be used in battle, but were meant to strip bark from trees for food.

Shllooop! A long spiked tail, too thin to balance on sprouted from her body. Her feet enlarged into bird of prey-like talons, her fingernails grew into claws as one of her fingers melded into another to form only four powerful fingers. In all other ways, she remained human. In her main body, though, an extra heart beat, and an extra lung gasped for air. A brain that was totally alien to a human's. More like a yeerk's, but more compassionate, more capable of feeling. She sat down on the edge of the human bed, weak. She was no human, and now she was what she had always really been. Daroneasa, the Hork-Bajir thinker.

chapter 7

That night, she decided what she would do. She left that house, with people who hardly knew her for parents, and headed to the mountains. She was quicker. Stealthy and sleek, running like a well trained athlete for hours. Normal Hork-Bajir bounded and leaped. But she was more humanoid, and she ran much like them. She was heading to the mountain home of the free Hork-Bajir, Jara and Ket and their seer daughter, Toby. She found the cliff Tobias had described within two hours, the strait wall that had a small entrance that lead to that hidden valley. "Where is the entrance?" She muttered, searching with her large eyes, which could see like a cat's in the dark. < Try and find it, Daroneasa! > She turned to have a tail blade at her throat. Ax smiled smugly with his eyes, the way Andalites do. < Heh, I was wise to spy on you, Daroneasa! Oh, I knew it was you from the way you acted! He, you think you'll enlist our friends in there to help you? They're our allies, not yours. They'd kill you if Tobias said so. > < He's right, Denise, er....Daroneasa. Just come with us and don't make us hurt you. > "What crime have I committed that I must follow you?" She demanded. < Crimes of war, of which you know you are wanted for by my people. And we cannot have an untrustworthy criminal like yourself running around, enlisting Hork-Bajir for your guerilla armies, and carrying our secrets. I don't know what will happen to you, but I can promise you won't live much longer. > Ax's words were harsh. Daroneasa smiled at him confidently, but walked with his blade poised to strike her at any moment. For nearly an hour they walked. Daroneasa knew Ax was getting board. She gently reached into her pocket. A dime. She tossed it with a light movement of her hand, so that Ax couldn't see. It made a movement and a slight noise in the brush. < Wha.. > Daroneasa ran. < HEY! Tobias, follow her! > Daroneasa smiled. Not even a hawk, who had lived in these woods for years, could catch her. < Ax! I'm loosing her! Get your butt over here! > It was a merry chase for her. She circled, dodged, even bluffed being hurt so that Ax would think he had won. Just as he began to gloat, though, she would rise and run again. Finally, after tiring, she got down to the business of hiding. A small thicket was all she could find. Tobias couldn't see her or where she went. < Hey! She disappeared! > < Impossible! She must be hiding here somewhere. > Ax protested. She laughed inwardly until the two finally gave up the search, and then fell asleep. Her's was a dreamless sleep, so at least she got some peace.

In the morning, she awoke shivering, cold and wet from the rain and dew of the morning. A heavy downpour made it nearly impossible to see. She looked around for some way to escape where she wouldn't have to worry about turning to find Ax's blade at her throat. She suspected one would be guarding the way back to the town, the other the way to the Hork-Bajir valley. Escape was her priority. She had all the time in the world to contact her cousins. She needed to show

the Animorphs she meant no harm. She found a low branch and swung into the trees. She was awkward, but managed to get going that way. < Daroneasa! > She smiled at the wet and uncomfortable Tobias, perched in the tree. "Hello Tobias. Good morning." He shook his feathers. < you... > She looked at him sadly. "Sorry about last night. I had no time to explain. I must get back to the barn. They will be meeting soon." Tobias didn't trust her for a minute, but began to follow her.

"Where the heck are those three?" Jake demanded angrily as water from the roof of the barn leaked onto his head. "Gee, I dunno. Maybe Tobias is eating road kill, Denise is getting the latest to subscription to 'Serial Killers inc., and Ax is eating god only knows what." Jake didn't appreciate Marco's humor today. Five minutes later, Tobias fluttered into the room. "Tobias! Where is..." Jake stared in awe at the creature who walked through the door. < Denise? Well, lets just say that Ax's hunch was right. We spent all night chasing her around the mountains. Ax will be here soon. He doesn't know she's here, so we may want to restrain them. I don't think their kind get along together well. > Daroneasa nodded. "I consider the Andalite race more my enemy than even the yeerks. Of course, you do not understand my reasons, for they are too complex to explain now. But trust me." Jake growled angrily. "They're our allies. You, however, are not. I assume you are Daroneasa?" She smiled. "Yes." "What are you?" Rachel asked, her muscles tensing, itching for a fight. "A rough draft, an early version of a Hork-Bajir. The first created by the Arn. Your friend Tobias has no doubt told you about our origins. The Arn who created us to herd trees. We were too smart for that. We would have evolved, and the Arns' precious balance would have been lost." She sneered. There was a loud movement from the door and... < DARONEASA?! > Ax's tail was at her throat in a heartbeat. < Say the word, my prince, and her vile head will role! > "Back off Ax!" Jake yelled. Daroneasa didn't move. Her eyes locked on Ax's and ,in a flash, her memory began to pour out like a river. It was like a dam breaking, with only small amounts going through, and then picking up speed and mass. More and more and more until the stream of her memory flowed normal again, and she remembered all. Ax removed his tail angrily. < Don't you realize?! She is worse than the yeerks! She is death herself almost! She will destroy us, push us into submission! > "I will not!" She defended. < You did so with the Hork-Bajir! You performed experiments on Niuk, one of your own evil people, you thinkers! We thought we destroyed you all, with the exception of the one the yeerks captured! > "You think we were the only ones? Dak Hamee's valley was our stronghold, but there were nearly a thousand others who escaped, you little fool! Even now, I remember, and I know what happens to all of you, and now I know who and what I am." She shouted, the words not making sense. The Animorphs managed a surprised gasp. She paused, thinking for a moment. "I can see you do not trust me as your ally. That is fine. I have a mission of my own." Her mind had only one thought now. Jiseka. She had to free him, even if it changed the future. For all she knew, she was simply in the past. She had no way of knowing that this was just a shadow, and that, in a few months, it would be gone. "Goodbye. And good luck." she whispered. She turned away from the Animorphs, the reality of what would happen within the next six months to them tearing at her soul.

Chapter 8

Daroneasa pressed her body against the cool brick of the large

suburban house, hiding in the shadows from the figure that approached. Nimue, feeding a small white dog in her back yard. She reached down and gently patted the creature on its fuzzy head. Nimue was the host of the yeerk, Visser Thirteen, Yakirsh. Yakirsh had no way of knowing of Daroneasa's presence as she played with the little dog. "I'm so glad I'm not a dog." She laughed, looking at the dog food with disdain. "But you like that stuff, don'tcha?" she laughed, rising to return to her home. Daroneasa knew that Yakirsh would be the liberator. The 'good' yeerk. But when she had known her, in the past, she was the destroyer of her people. Daroneasa didn't have any idea why she changed, but she really didn't care. She needed Yakirsh's help, but she wanted revenge. But she knew that if she slashed Yakirsh, she might not be able to stop, and then she'd ruin her chances by killing her. Daroneasa moved slightly, preparing to pounce. SNAP! A twig. Daroneasa cursed under her breath as Yakirsh looked in her direction. "Who's there?" She demanded, her voice trembling as she saw Daroneasa's eyes flash in the darkness. "No..." She made no sound. Only her mouth moved as Daroneasa leaped at her. Yakirsh screamed and turned, but was knocked to the ground, into the mud. The little white dog barked angrily at Daroneasa, nipping her heels. Daroneasa ignored it. Yakirsh rolled over and looked up at Daroneasa, dizzy. Then, her eyes widened in fear. "NO! It can't be! I am dreaming!" "Nightmare." Daroneasa growled angrily. How she wanted to feel her blade slice into the mud-covered throat of her people's killer. But she remembered that Nimue, the human, was not to blame, only Yakirsh, who controlled her every action. But, Nimue had allied herself with Yakirsh, allowed herself to be taken. She had no excuse. If Daroneasa could have killed her and still accomplished her mission, she would have. Nimue closed her eyes and let her head fall back, sobbing. "Kill me! Please, Daroneasa, kill me. I know now what I have done to you." "You have no idea!" Daroneasa hissed. Yakirsh nodded. "I will not fight. Do what you will. Starve me of kandrona rays, cut the throat of this host, or I will leave her and let you kill me as I am, just a slug." "I don't want to kill you." Daroneasa sighed, the words hard for her. Yakirsh opened one eye and looked at her in surprise. "You don't?" She said, amazed. "Well, yes I do. But I can't. I need your help." Daroneasa reached down with a shaky hand, helping Yakirsh out of the mud. "What do you want? Anything, everything. I owe you my life...I can never make up to you the pain I have caused." "I need a ship, one that would sustain me for a year at least." "Is that all? I have several hidden in the mountains for emergencies. I will give you directions to two, just in case you cannot find them." Daroneasa nodded, thinking that when she finished writing, she could kill her. But then, what about the future? Without Yakirsh to free the slaves, who would? Daroneasa sighed as Yakirsh handed her the paper. "Be careful. Good luck." Daroneasa looked at her surprised, but managed a forced sneer as she turned away. Yakirsh watched her retreat into the shadows, tears streaming from her eyes. "Daroneasa..." Daroneasa turned. Yakirsh could only see her eyes. "For what it is worth, I am sorry." Daroneasa sighed. "It is worth nothing to me. But to you, it should be. There's hope for you yet." Yakirsh watched the shadows until she could no longer hear Daroneasa's light footsteps. She sank to her knees, back into the mud, sobbing. Not with fear or relief, as one might think, but with disappointment that Daroneasa didn't kill her. But she didn't have long to wait. A figure pounced upon her, so quickly she only had time to see a blood red eye and a glimpse of fine blond hair as the Yeerk Toxin was poured into her host's ear. It reached her, and she convulsed, a spasm throughout her own shapeless body as well as Nimue's. "Finally, Yakirsh, revenge IS mine." said the dark figure.

Yakirsh gained enough control of the host eyes to watch him walk away. "Oh god...finally, it has happened..." Yakirsh thought of the pain she'd caused. She had no idea who had just done this, but it was not Daroneasa. It was a male... Her mind began to shut down, her body liquidated and drained from the host body, and the name of her assailant came to her in the end. "Yes...fitting..." That was her last thought.

Chapter 9

The first ship was very easy to find. No problem at all. It was hidden in a small rock query. Nothing difficult to find. She thought about going back to kill Yakirsh, but her anger had burned out. She just felt weak. Something in the back of her mind told her that this was something other than the past. But she didn't know why. Or how. She climbed into the ship wearily. It was practically empty. It smelled of disinfectant and filthy yeerk pools. She found a portable kandrona and a yeerk pool in the hold, along with some survival gear, a few bio-freeze tanks, food, and some weapons. She chose a gun that was a Hork-Bajir thinker design, modified by the yeerks. She was angry, but didn't have time to worry about the obvious patent theft. She found two small daggers, as well. One, she strapped to her ankle, and the other she hid in her hair. Her years of experience in battle told her that she could never be too careful. She returned to the bridge and growled as she slipped into her seat, wishing she'd taken the time to learn how to pilot a fighter. Jiseka had always been the best pilot in her army, and she had left the flying up to him. He liked it, and she was the kind who puked until they entered Z-space. But, thankfully, it had an autopilot. She'd worry about the course as soon as she got away from earth. This ship had absolutely no cloaking device. "Yippee" she muttered, grabbing the power stick. Couldn't be that hard... Just ease into lift off and.... CRUNCH!!!! SWOOOSH!!!! "AHHHH!!!!!" she screamed as the ship was launched into the sky. The controls turned out to be a bit more complicated than she had first thought. She struggled for a minute, finally getting the ship under control. "Alien fighting craft approaching." The computer droned. She glanced at the radar. F22 Raptors. She could hear their radio. "What the heck IS that?" "Stay on course. Prepare to fire!" "SHIT!" she muttered in English. It was one of her favorite curse words. "Sir. I heard a female voice. I think she said 'shit'" The two jets were alongside her now. She could see the pilots through the lenses. "OMIGOD!" screeched one of the pilots, finding himself staring at a strangely attractive alien. She smiled. "Don't worry. I'm just your average alien out on a nice Sunday night cruise. See ya!" She hit the boosters and finally lost them. She sighed as she left the atmosphere of Earth. "Now..." she muttered, turning to the computer. She searched for the name "Jiseka". "Found in Visser host file" chimed the computer. Her heart skipped a beat as an image of Jiseka appeared onscreen. His eyes, though, were hollow. Dead. No feelings... "Host of Visser Fifteen. Would you like to contact him?" She thought for a moment. "Yes. Visser Thirteen to Visser Fifteen." After a few moments, Jiseka's face appeared on the screen. The eyes went from the dead hollow ghost of his old self to full out, painful Jiseka. "Dar! No, god please no!!!" he screamed, bursting into tears. She felt a vice grip her heart. Jiseka had temporarily overpowered the yeerk in his head, in the grip of intense pain and sadness that his only love had been taken, so he thought. "I'm sorry, Visser. My host harbors strong feelings for yours. It is at time difficult to control. Daroneasa wanted to kill that yeerk. She wanted to tell Jiseka that she was still free, But Visser Fifteen could not be allowed to

discover her plan. "Yes I understand. My own host is screaming now. These thinkers are often difficult to control" Jiseka's eyes filled with tears, and she could tell that the yeerk was struggling for control. "I want to meet you at RG-789-3 in one month. Can you do that? We need to discuss a certain 'friend'. Visser Fifteen nodded, thinking that she was implying to Visser Three. Visser Fifteen was very ambitious, very young. He wanted an Andalite host, so he was always looking for allies against Visser Three. "See you then." As his face faded, she heard Jiseka's voice. "Don't give up, love..." She burst into tears. Jiseka had been a slave for over thirty years, and he forgave her, understood somehow that she couldn't have saved him from his doomed life. It was a quality that she lacked. Jiseka was so forgiving. Not a fool, and he was always cautious, but he never held a grudge. It was a quality that Daroneasa lacked. She turned in her seat after plotting the course. She froze as a glade was held to her throat. "He, Visser Thirteen, huh? Well, I hate to say this, but I'm canceling your flight." Tobias growled. Of course she was a controller. How could he have trusted her in the least bit? "Tobias, it was an act. I am trying to free the host of Visser Fifteen." "Yeah, sure. Kinda convenient how you stashed this ship here, seeing as you're supposed to have had amnesia since you came to Earth." < Prince Jake? What do you want us to do? > Ax, of course. "From what you've told me, neither Daroneasa or this Visser deserve to live. But we will wait three days. Unless you want to make it a quick death, yeerk. Leave that host and let us interrogate her. I know it'd be better than Kandrona starvation." Daroneasa clenched her teeth. She could not allow all her plans to be ruined. "I am not a controller, but, I will agree to wait three days." She felt Tobias, in his Hork-Bajir morph, grab her hands and her shoulder. He would have no trouble restraining her. As she was led to the back of the ship, Ax stopped them, looking for any weapons. He found the dagger on her ankle and the gun. < He, pathetic. > he sneered, looking scornfully at the little Dagger. She smirked at him. < Why they call you thinkers, I'll never know. You don't seem to think too much. > She growled as Tobias pushed her forward, into a room. "Tobias, I'm not a yeerk. I'm not your enemy. I only want to free my love. Surly you, son of Elfangor, can understand." She muttered as Ax left. "How'd you know that?" "Hard to explain, but I'm from thirty years in the future. I know things that you told me. We were never allies, you and I, but we were friends." Tobias shook his head. "Lies." He leveled the dracon at me as I took a step forward. "Filthy yeerk lies." Daroneasa sneered. "It's too bad that you ally yourself with the Andalites. They're worse than the yeerks...." "They're our only hope They are fighting for freedom. The yeerks enslave. The Andalites liberate. You are trying to free your friend, so you say. How can you support them? The Andalites fought for your world, and you resisted them!" Tobias seemed suddenly conflicted. He knew that that was not entirely true. The Andalites didn't give a damn about the Hork-Bajir. "You know Dak Hamee's story. The Andalites released a quantum virus on us. That was after every Thinker in my valley, my friends, my step-sister, my foster family, were killed by them. Only my friend Jalrai and my love Jiseka lived. I was sent to some alternate dimension. Jis was taken by the yeerks. And only God knows where Jalrai is. The Andalites took my friend, Niuk, too. Do you want to know what they will do in five years? Do you?!" "Lies, all yeerk lies!" "You want to know what they'll do to the yeerks after they make peace? The Chee, and your friend Toby Hamee? To the benevolent K'glique?!" Tobias growled at her. "Stop.....stop." "No! You must realize the truth! Tobias, you and Marco were, and still are, dear friends. Cassie too. Jake was as well! You were all part of the

Andalite army, you were even a war prince. But we were friends, still." Daroneasa's memory was returning, full force. And then, quite suddenly, she realized the truth herself. She was in a quickly collapsing universe. An alternate dimension, an exact replica of the real dimension, thirty years ago. It was created to save her from the Andalites.... She felt that cold vice grip her heart again. She was talking to shadows. Tobias was still alive in the real universe. What would happen to this one? To the ones who had died, like Jake? To Jiseka? She told herself that she still had to try to reach this shadow of her friend. And she had to save Jiseka. If she couldn't he'd be gone for good, and she knew it. "Tobias, you will never understand in this dimension, but the Andalites are worse than the yeerks ever dreamed of being. There are so many things that Ax hasn't told you, that you will learn the hard way." "Daroneasa, I don't believe you." Tobias clenched his Hork0Bajir teeth. "I know you don't. But you will. I have to tell you. You won't be able to stop the fate of your friends, but you must know!" Tobias closed the door to the room and sat next to Daroneasa against a wall. "I have to guard you for the next hour." he sighed, concealing all emotion. "Ax and you Animorphs would have visited Visser Thirteen in a month. She led a yeerk resistance, similar to Aftran's. She was a good yeerk. She gave Ax the key to killing his enemy, Visser Three. She saved you all from being controllers, at the expense of her love's life. She destroyed the council of thirteen, freed all the hosts. But Ax was changed by his victory over Visser Three. Five years later, he leads an unprovoked attack on the peaceful yeerks. He kills them all, destroys them all. Visser Thirteen manages to escape to the K'glique world. Then, the Andalites started a war with the K'glique. We Hork-Bajir thinkers, numbering less than a thousand, and the Taxxons helped them. But you humans and the Andalites and the Skrit Na were too powerful." She buried her face in her hands. The pain she endured during that war, scarred over from her years as a human, came back full force. Sometimes old wounds bleed as bright as new ones. "They...Ax and his army, killed my son. He was only a few days old when they bombed the rebel base. My best friend Heska, and the last Chee, Erek, died too." Tobias stared at her. She was sobbing. He knew now that she couldn't be lying. "Ax does this?" he choked. "He changes. He becomes intoxicated with his own power and blinded with the effort to live up to his brother's legend. You befriended Milkaan, the leader of the K'glique. Ax almost killed you when you comforted poor Milkaan as he was dying from wounds inflicted by Ax's shredder beam. But that last ounce of loyalty to his Shorm and his nephew stopped him. We lost that war. The K'glique and the Taxxons were annihilated, along with most of us thinkers. Those who weren't, about a hundred, were taken by the Andalites, put in prison camps and subjected to terrible experiments. That's what happened to Toby Hamee. The Andalites will rule the galaxy." "Oh my god..." Tobias moaned. "Who dies? All of us?" Daroneasa sighed. "I will never tell you how they die. I can't. But Ax, Jake, and Rachel die eight years after the war." Tobias was crying. "I know that is so much to take in. The truth that I hide from you even now is worse. The reality of this world, this dimension, is too. I only want to save my love, Jiseka. Can't you understand, Tobias??" He clenched his fists. "I cannot help you." He stood and opened the door. "I'm sorry." he sighed. He made the mistake of turning his back. Daroneasa hated to do it, but she knocked him in the back of his head with her fist. Hard. Tobias lost his balance and fell. She shoved him into the room, ran into the hall, and locked it. He stood up and pounded on the door, screaming in anger. "Sorry, Tobias. I have to save Jiseka, and if you aren't my ally, then you are my enemy. I won't kill you, but I can't

allow you to run around my ship and spoil my plans." She ran down to the hold. A hologram projector was in a small box next to the entrance. Just what she needed. She ran towards the bridge. She had a plan. She listened as she approached to Ax's angry thought-speech. < She has entered some strange code to protect this course from being altered. > Marco laughed. "What? Too advanced for even the mighty Ax?" < Of course not! It's probably ridiculously primitive. I must have overestimated her. > Marco giggled. "You have done the exact opposite." Daroneasa chuckled, stepping into full view. < DARONEASA! > She winked at them. "Catch me if you can!" As expected, they all took off after her. She smiled, using the hologram to project an image of herself disappearing into a small room. They all piled in. She slammed the door after them and locked it with a code. "Sorry, guys." She muttered. She ignored their howls of fury and returned to the bridge. < I'll kill you, Daroneasa! I'll kill you! > Daroneasa sighed and rubbed her forehead. It was going to be a long month.

Chapter 10

Erek walked down the hall, moving the hologram so it seemed like Sofor, and trying to maintain an air of arrogance. Only scientists moved past him now. The warrior at his side led him down a white hall. Past force fields, different creatures stared out with sad eyes. It was all Erek could do not to show his sympathy. < This one. Specimen 42203. He's a danger to our entire system. Plus, if someone, who had...undesirable politics..., learned of his existence, well, it could lead to trouble. It is a wise decision, to terminate him. > Erek nodded. The decision was wise. Merciful. Specimen 44203 was a young Hork-Bajir thinker, with the sad eyes of the other prisoners. He wore a simple pair of denim shorts, and his body was scarred up and down, like he'd been beaten all his life. His temples had dark bruises from 'shock therapy'. < Refresh my memory on what exactly this is. > Erek said as coldly as possible. < During the K'glique war, we destroyed a rebel base. We found Daroneasa's quarters, but all we found was this infant, perhaps a day or two old. No one knew that she was pregnant, and I think she wanted it that way. She was good at hiding her weaknesses. > Erek thought back. Yes. That was the reason Daroneasa never told anyone but him. He had kept her secret these seventeen years. When the Andalites came and destroyed the base, he had been protecting the infant. He had been nearly destroyed by that blast. His only job had been to protect her child, and he had failed. Now, he would fulfill his duty. < We know now the father was Jiseka. Figures. He was her second in command for quite some time. > The young warrior sounded smug with this remark. Erek looked at him angrily. What did he know of Daroneasa and Jiseka? Erek looked back at the young Hork-Bajir. He expected to see hate in his eyes, like Nissa and Gihash, who were both tortured by the Andalites, but instead he saw forgiveness. A deep knowledge. He forgave the Andalites, and he didn't hate them. Erek smiled to himself. He looked at the sensors on the ceiling. < ALERT! ALERT! PRISONER ESCAPING IN HALL 254! ALL WARRIORS AND PERSONEL TO HALL 254! > < Oh! My prince, I am ashamed to ask you, but could I go help? Your own tail can take care of that thing in there. Please? > He sounded like a begging child. < Go along. I'll take care of him. > The excited warrior skittered away, anxious for action. Scientists evacuated to the outside. Erek typed a code and the force field let him through. He stood over the young Hork-Bajir for a moment, contemplating him. "You have come to kill me. That is good. I shall not be in pain." Erek felt overwhelming pity for the poor Hork-Bajir. He dropped the

hologram. Specimen 42203 blinked in surprise but then smiled. "You are a new creature to me. Are you an android?" "Yes. I will explain later. You must come with me." Specimen 42203 staggered to his feet and began following EreK, limping slowly. < It's a trick! There are none escaped! Find prince Sofor! > "Crap!" EreK said. He whirled around and grabbed Specimen 42203, carrying him down the hall, going as fast as he possibly could, which was actually very fast. At the end of the hall, The young warrior saw him and knew what had happened. < The Android! It has Specimen 42203! It's a rebel! Help! > EreK dodged past him, and the Andalite charged after him, followed by about twenty Andalite warriors. "We must go faster." Specimen 42203 said calmly "No duh!" EreK shouted, picking up speed. < Emergency doors shutting. > "NO!" The door ahead of them was shutting, and it would be locked. ZOOM! They escaped by an inch, and were into the streets before the warriors could catch them. EreK turned on his hologram, and they blended in well with the crowd.

Chapter 11

Tobias demorphed quickly, looking for any way to escape. What a fool he was! How could he have let her trick him like that, with her fake tears and tales of Andalite evil. He, a war prince? Flattery, woven into an intricate tale by the devious mind of a yeerk. None of it could be true. How could it? But if that was right, why did his instincts say yes, she told the truth? Tobias sighed and morphed to his human morph. His hawk body was too edgy in the little room. There was a small bed in the corner. He curled up for some rest. He couldn't allow himself to fall asleep, but.... "Tobias?" "Daroneasa!" he growled in surprise and contempt. he looked out the clear little window. "I apologize. You don't know how much I care for Jiseka. This is my last chance to save him." "Spare me your sob stories, Yeerk." "Why would I lie to you? You're at my mercy. I could kill you right now if I wanted." "What about my friends?" "Safe, across the hall. Look, I can't be worrying about you six. I'm gonna put you in bio-freeze. You'll be frozen. You won't need any food. It won't hurt you, either. I'll unfreeze you as soon as Jiseka and I are together. I'm not going back to Earth. Tobias detected the faint smell of some kind of gas. "What is that?" "Sleeping gas. Demorph, or you'll be a nothlit when you awaken." He decided not to risk it. Just as he finished, he felt dizzy. "You'll be fine." Daroneasa smiled as he passed out.

Daroneasa did the same with the other Animorphs, and put them all in the bio-freeze tanks below. They'd be safe, she hoped.

One Month Later:

Daroneasa was so bored she could hardly stand it. Nothing to do but read computer files and think, or listen to human music, which the yeerks seemed to enjoy. It was pretty, even invigorating at times, but she'd listened to every song a dozen times. She was listening to one of her favorites, a song from the Celtic music CD. About a young warrior who had to fight in a war for Ireland and died, widowing his new bride. It was very sad. She identified with this kind of music. She'd lost many she loved in battle. Just as it reached the climax, she heard a loud crash below. "Perfect." She muttered, grabbing a dracon beam. She crept into the hold, listening to the heavy breathing of the intruder. Intruders, actually. She could hear four people. She set her gun to stun. "Freeze!" She turned to see a face, half Hork-Bajir thinker, half machine. The abomination laughed at her

in a low, evil voice. She half recognized it for some reason. The mechanic eye lit up bright red, and his biological one reflected intense hate. "Back!" She growled as he took a step towards her. She looked past him. Two humans and an Andalite, all of them young. No more than twenty or so. Arisths of the new Andalite and human army. The humans were familiar. The boy looked at her, his eyes wide. "Darmeafhsa!" he cried, his voice muffled by the gag in his mouth. They were all in military force field bonds. The boy had messy blond hair. Blue eyes... Blaire, she realized, Tobias and Rachel's son....from the future, like her. The girl must be Ryan, their eldest daughter. There was another girl, Blaire's twin, Heather. Where was she? The female Andalite Aristh was obviously either Atrea, Elfangor's daughter, or Meuik, Ax's daughter. "Like my collection?" The cyborg lashed out with his thin tail. Daroneasa caught a flash of blond hair as he knocked her down. "I call it the "Children of the Animorphs" collection. I'm afraid that you aren't one of them, but you'll still do." Daroneasa grabbed the little knife in her hair as the monster grabbed her. She drew it back and slashed her hand. He howled in pain, dropping her. She ran, hearing the monster behind her. She managed to hide behind the little portable yeerk pool. "Here, bitch,bitch,bitch..." the cyborg taunted. Daroneasa listened for him. She quieted her breathing, but she felt like her heart, which was pounding like crazy, would give her away. How the hell did all these people get on her ship? What did that thing want with her? She heard him approach, his large feet making a terrible sound as they hit the metal floor. He was right behind the corner... BAM! The whole ship rocked and vibrated. Daroneasa fell, thrown off balance. She pulled herself to her feet and ran. "Daroneasa!" screamed the abomination. She made the mistake of looking back. He was running after her, taking great strides with his long legs. He was very slender actually. But he could break her tiny body in half if he caught her with those robot arms. "Visser Thirteen? This is Visser Fifteen. Please dock your ship." What? No time. Suddenly, the cyborg screamed in surprise as a male Hork-Bajir thinker jumped in front of him. "Visser?" asked the voice of Jiseka. "Wait a few minutes!" She screamed at the intercom. "Sheesh, don't get mad." Daroneasa turned to watch the two, circling each other. She noticed three strange humans and a female Hork-Bajir thinker on the other side, watching. "Kill him." breathed the female. The young thinker launched himself at the Cyborg, letting out a wild battle cry. The warrior had no chance. He was bigger, strong and fast, but the cyborg was super strong. The cyborg grabbed him by his neck in mid air. "Poor fool!" he hissed, squeezing the young thinker's throat with his mechanical fingers. "GIHASH!" screamed Tommy, making a dash for the Cyborg. A strong, responsible looking human grabbed the boy, who was about the same age. The girl, Daroneasa, thought, was Heather. And the boy who had grabbed the one who had called the thinker Gihash was Desmond. Gihash's feet kicked, trying to struggle free. Nothing could save him. "Nissa....Tommy..." The human who had tried to save him was crying. "Be brave, friend! We can't..." Nissa began to laugh. The woman Gihash had given everything for laughed as he was being asphyxiated by the cold metal fist. He was dying for her, not for Daroneasa. He didn't know her. He'd known Nissa since they were young, when he had saved her as he escaped from the lab they'd both been born in. That woman who he'd give anything, if only she'd have loved him... "You've failed me, Gihash. I'll see you in hell." The cyborg turned his head and stared at her, his eye twitching. "You bitch! You're next!" Daroneasa thought she saw pity in the cyborg's eyes as he spoke to the poor young thinker. "It is no comfort, but I understand what it's like to have someone throw your love and loyalty

in your face. It's too bad that you must die. Sorry." Gihash was not comforted. He felt a vein or an artery pop in his neck. The cyborg dropped him. Gihash realized, suddenly, what Nissa was. What she had turned him into. A killing machine, consumed by hate. No less a monster than the creature who had sealed his fate. "oh...god..." he thought, feeling his lungs breathing slower and slower. What a fool he was. He prayed that somehow all he had done wrong might be made right someday. He could hear his own heart stopping as he began to sink into oblivion. He managed one last breath, speaking now to Daroneasa. He'd destroyed Jiseka, who had loved and trusted him like a son. Just because Nissa told him to. "I'm sorry, Daroneasa..." He could speak no more. His eyes stared ahead as the darkness took him. "Forgive me..." he thought at last... "Forgive me."

Chapter 12

"Thank you." Ereik set Specimen 42203 down, letting him walk beside him towards the base. "Tell me all you know about yourself." Ereik said. 42203 looked troubled. "My earliest memories are from when I was very small, just learning to walk. I lived in the same room all my life, and almost every day I would be taken to a huge room, where the Andalites would perform experiments on me. Afterwards, I would be weak and unable to move for hours, always in intense pain. They hooked electric currents to my temples. I could hear them talking about me sometimes. My caretaker, a female Andalite, was very kind to me, but detached. She died when I was ten. I began to understand things. Languages and other stuff that I heard. I have learned two human languages, English and Spanish, and have learned my own people's language, and Galard. The Andalites would sometimes test my intelligence by putting me in a kind of maze. If I didn't go the way they wanted, they would shock me. I had to memorize my way through it. A human scientist said that his people called it a 'rat maze'. I learned from them who I was when they talked. They said I was the son of two warriors, leaders of some rebellion. I don't know much else. I have no memory of my parents." "No, you wouldn't. You were only two days old when the Andalites took you." Specimen 42203 stopped and stared. "You knew my parents?" Ereik nodded. "Your mother was Daroneasa, leader of the rebels, your father was her second in command, Jiseka. You were born during the K'glique war. Daroneasa begged me to keep you a secret until the war ended, fearing the Andalites would try to kill you. Your father was her second in command. He never knew about you, but he was a wonderful person, kind and forgiving like you." "And my mother? What was she like? Are either of them still alive?" "Your father was killed. And Daroneasa...she is being rescued from another dimension. With any luck, I will reunite you two. She thought you and I had been killed when the Andalites came." Ereik stopped at a door in the alley and led Specimen 42203 in. They were greeted by Ajani, who was immediately interested in this new stranger. "Who is this?" "This is Ajani. She is a clone of Daroneasa." "Hi!" Ajani looked up at Specimen 42203, who was extremely tall and thin. His skin was light, like his father's, and his eyes were deep blue, his hair a medium blond. He bent down to greet the child at eye level. "Hello." He smiled. "Are you going to join the rebels?" She asked, matter-of-factly. "I dunno." He looked up at Ereik for advice on this. "We shall see. Did Nissa call on the communicator?" "Oh! Yes she did, and she said it was urgent. She called me a name, too, because you weren't here and she was angry." Ereik looked furious. "She should not do that. I will talk to her." He walked into the control room. "Nissa, this is Ereik. Nissa, come in." "Ereik? Where the hell have you been!?" "I had to go

get something." He lied. "This mission is too important for you to go on your little toy search! That brat has enough god damn toys! You stupid idiot! You can't even run this thing right. How come there are two Arisths and some cyborg running around here?" "Where are you?" "On some ship, with Daroneasa. But there's this damn cyborg screwing things up!" "Where is Gihash and the others?" "Gihash? Well.....he...um....the cyborg killed him. Yeah. And the others are with me. Get ready to open the gate when I tell you. Out." "Shit!" Ereik cursed, throwing the communicator across the room. Gihash was dead. Nissa didn't give a damn. She used people like that. But Gihash had loved her so much. How could she do such a thing. He cursed to himself. Specimen 42203 covered Ajani's ears. "That bitch!" Chapter 13

The cyborg turned to find Nissa's gun in his face. "He, how about you just be a good little rust bucket and get your metal ass in that room?" She shoved him into the same small room Tobias had been in. Daroneasa looked at the small group. Heather and Desmond were trying to comfort their friend. "Tommy...look, I'm sorry..." Nissa began. But she wasn't. She kicked the body of the slayed warrior. "Stupid bastard...." Daroneasa slapped her. Hard. "Bitch. He died for you, you ungrateful wretch." "So?" Daroneasa clenched her fist, and sank down next to Gihash. She brushed the messy black hair out of his face and closed his eyes. She had no idea why he'd apologized, but she could guess. It didn't take a rocket scientist. "You must come with me." Nissa put a hand on Daroneasa's shoulder. Why did she give a damn about some low life warrior? Daroneasa brushed her away. "I'm not going anywhere without Jiseka." Daroneasa said, giving Nissa an accusing look. Something told her that Nissa had been the death of Jiseka in the real world. Nissa swallowed and clenched her teeth. "Fine." Daroneasa grabbed Nissa's gun. "I'm going to the hold. I'll be back in ten minutes. Dock the ship. Don't talk to anyone and don't touch anything!" Nissa nodded as Daroneasa left. Desmond looked at her as she brushed past. "Daroneasa?" She stopped and looked back at him. "Yeah?" "I never thanked you for what you did for my mom and Marco and I...you and Jiseka." "Thanks later, please." she smiled sadly. She disappeared below. She couldn't find the three, and the Animorphs were gone from the bio-freeze. It was easy to figure out what had happened. One had gotten free and been a big hero and saved everyone. They were in morph somewhere..... She shrugged. Nothing she could do about it now. She hoped they'd have the sense to stay onboard. She must act quickly. She peered in the cyborg's room on her way to the bridge. He was sitting in a corner, his knees against his chest, his head lowered. His shoulders shook with sobs. She sighed. Maybe he was not so evil. She didn't know. She made her way to the bridge. "We're docked. Visser Fifteen wants to meet you outside." Nissa chimed. "Come with me. Remember, we're controllers. Don't say one word, got it?" She glared at the four. "Yeah, sure." Nissa smiled. Daroneasa was perplexed by Nissa. She must have split personalities or something. Outside the ship, Nissa growled lowly as Visser Fifteen approached them. She was growling at Jiseka. "Greetings, Visser Thirteen. I trust you had a safe and pleasant journey." Visser Fifteen was having enormous difficulty controlling Jiseka. His eyes were filled with tears, and he twitched nervously. His mouth would open to say words that the Yeerk in his head didn't want said, and, as always, the yeerk won. Daroneasa watched him for a moment and sighed, looking at the guards. Then, in a low whisper. "You and I might want to talk alone. After all, we're both having..difficulty controlling these hosts." Visser Fifteen nodded, relieved, and led her to a small room across the dock. Daroneasa

smiled to herself. Nissa watched her for a moment and suddenly realized her plan. He, of course. Daroneasa would have found Yeerk Toxin in the hold. She opened her com link. "Erek, things are gonna go down in five...four...three....two....one..." A piercing scream as Visser Fifteen was scalded and poisoned by the toxin. "He, open the porthole. The hold, okay? Be there in a minute." She ran for the ship, motioning to her charges to follow. Daroneasa and a very dizzy and confused Jiseka followed. "What do you want with me? Who are you?" "Duh. Do you think any yeerk can take me?" Daroneasa screamed as about a million Dracon beams fired at them. "THANK GOD!" Jis screamed, dodging a shot from a human controller. Daroneasa had made no plans to return to Earth. But certain death tends to quite an incentive. Once inside, Nissa and the others were running for the hold. "What are you doing?!" Daroneasa screamed after them. "No time! Hurry up!" Nissa looked back, and pointed to the hole in the wall. Wasn't that the room the cyborg... "OH SHIT!" Daroneasa exclaimed, grabbing Jiseka's hand and prompting him to go faster. He'd always been a bit clumsy. Strong and quick, but his feet seemed to be too big for his legs. "We have to get out of here before that...THING...finds us, Jis. He's gonna try to kill me!" "Why?" She shook her head and shrugged. Below, Daroneasa could see the porthole. "What the?" "Jump in!" Nissa called, delving into it. Heather, Desmond, and Tommy were next. Jiseka grabbed Daroneasa's arm as she prepared to follow. "It might be a trap! I don't trust that girl." "With good reason." thought Daroneasa, and then, aloud. "No, don't worry. If it is, we have nothing to lose, love." Jiseka shrugged and jumped. Daroneasa started after him, but, suddenly, she felt a cold metal arm on her shoulder. "hehehehe..." the mechanical voice laughed, pushing her through the porthole.

Chapter 14

"Where'd she go?? What the heck?! Who's that? Jiseka, Where is Daroneasa?" "I don't know but..." he looked at the two Arisths holding guns at them. "We have a problem." He jerked his head towards Meuik and Blair. Meuik and Blair, though, had forgotten Heather. She smacked them both in the head, knocking them unconscious. "Sorry, Bro." she muttered.

Erek stepped back as ...Marco, Ax, Jake, and Rachel piled into the room?

The Animorphs suddenly remembered the real world. What happened. They writhed in pain at the images flowing through their heads. Everyone else stepped away. "What's going on?" Jiseka asked, confused. But the same thing was happening to him...but the truth was not so painful for him. He looked at Nissa, who grinned at him, enjoying his horrified gaze. Erek frowned. "They aren't meant to be here. I don't know. They may be remembering...." < No...no... > Ax was sobbing. He knew the truth. And it was destroying him. The knowledge that he would be Jake's killer. He felt sick to the very core of his soul. "Do something!" Heather screamed. "I can do nothing until the stream of memory flows normal." Specimen 42203 looked on with fascinated horror. Half an hour ago, he had been in a cell, awaiting death, and now here he was, witnessing things he never dreamed possible. But he felt awful watching the Animorphs die. Suddenly, they just stopped. Jake lifted himself to his feet and looked around. He was the true Jake, as he had been before Ax killed him. The hardened warrior. And Marco and Ax and Rachel... Rachel grinned at her cousin in an evil way. She advanced forward. "No!" Desmond protested. "Who are you?"

Jake demanded. "I...I'm Desmond." Jake looked confused for a moment, glancing at the other changed Animorphs. "What are we doing? We don't have to do this...we can start again. We aren't enemies." < We are now. I don't want to fight you, my prince, but I have no control! > Ereka grimaced. Somehow, Ax had been affected in a different way than the others. He was LIVING his fate again. < Please stop me! > Ax begged, advancing towards Jake. MeuiK reached out and grabbed at Ax's arm in vain. Suddenly, Specimen 42203 jumped between the two. "Please don't fight!" he begged. Ax's tail shot forward. "NO!" Screamed Ereka and Ajani at the same time. Ax's tail connected with 42203's chest, striking him to the floor. < No! > Ax moaned. < Prince Jake! Stop me! I will kill you! > he moaned. Heather ran to 42203's side, dragging him away from the inevitable battle. < I'm sorry! > Ax's tail shot forward, striking Jake. Jake fell. Marco sprang forward. The fate had taken him, too. But why not Jiseka? Of course...Jiseka had no fate other than to die by Nissa's hand. And Nissa was from this world. He was safe from his fate. Marco screamed in horror, unable to control his own actions. "Kill us!" He begged of the terrified group watching from the other side of the room. < Yes! Please! > Tommy grabbed MeuiK's shredder beam and shot. His mark hit true, hitting Marco in the head. Marco fell, dead. Ax stood shaking with terror at himself. His tail was stained with blood. Marco and Jake lay dead at his feet. He looked over at Tommy. < Kill me...please, please kill me. I can never live with this guilt. > "It's not your fault." Ereka protested. < Oh, but it is. I've killed Jake twice now. It is my fault, and I only want to die. Please. > Tommy nodded and pointed the gun at him. "Me too." Rachel sniffed. She stood next to Ax, trembling. Heather and MeuiK looked at their parents, both younger than themselves, both truly criminals, but not. It was over in two shots. The bodies of the Animorphs disappeared. But the tragedy was not finished. Specimen 42203 lay gasping in Ereka's arms. Ereka could do nothing. If he had only been cut, that would have been fine, but he had lost too much blood. "I've failed you again." Ereka moaned. "No...that's okay. You tried." 42203 smiled. Ereka applied some pressure to his wound. He would live less than an hour at best. Jiseka looked at the dying youth. He knelt down and studied his features... "Oh my god..." Ereka smiled at him sadly. Jiseka bowed his head and heaved a sob. Then, he took over the job of keeping pressure on the gaping wound. "It's okay, son. It's okay..." he soothed. Specimen 42203 looked at Ereka in confusion. Ereka smiled gently. "This is Jiseka. Your father." Specimen 42203 nodded, wincing in pain. "Isn't this sad?" Growled Nissa, emerging from the shadows. "Nissa!" "Kill Jiseka and that little bastard now." "I cannot. It goes against my programming." Ereka growled. Even if it didn't, he would never do such a thing. He was not Nissa's fool, like Gihash was. Nissa smiled slyly, and suddenly reached out and grabbed Ajani. "I'll kill her if you don't kill me!" She laughed. She nodded to Tommy. "Vaporize the traitor, please." Tommy looked at her with anger. She had saved his life more than once, but now he realized, only for herself. Only so she could use him for his powers to set things on fire or destroy lives. "No, no more. I won't do you dirty work anymore." He growled, setting the weapon aside. "Fools!" She held her blade to Ajani's throat. A sudden force hit her from behind, and she dropped Ajani. Heather ran forward and grabbed the sobbing child, cradling her and protecting her from Nissa. Nissa growled and looked back to see her attacker. "Daroneasa?" The cyborg grinned and grabbed Daroneasa's arm again. She had managed to struggle free. "Well, this is cute. I'm afraid I'll have to finish out here. Nissa, you're next. You're exactly like this bitch."

Nissa looked up and opened her mouth to protest. The cyborg cut her off. "As we speak, there is a force field protecting this building. But there is also a bomb that will destroy everything in this city outside. When I kill Daroneasa, that Andalite and those humans are next! I'll show you for destroying my life!" "No!" Jiseka screamed, launching himself at the creature. "Stay out of this, Jiseka. You are a fool, no different than the young one I killed earlier..." He hit Jiseka in the head, sending him flying into Desmond, rendering them both unconscious. "Sorry, my friend." Daroneasa's eyes widened in sudden recognition. "NIUK!" This creature, this monster, once her dear friend, even her love before Jiseka, sweet, gentle, but ever so ambitious Niuk. Niuk, who died when the Andalites came to their world, so early in the Hork-Bajir war, decades ago. He had been captured, killed, she thought. "You're dead!" Niuk laughed. "You are a fool, Daroneasa! Finally revenge will be mine!" "What? Niuk, why do you want revenge against me?" Niuk scoffed and spit in her eye, rage seething from him. His red metal eye burned bright. "Why? You have the insolence to ask why? You, you who left me to be tortured by the Andalites, who left me to them so they could turn me into...a monster. A monster! You let them! You left me behind, you left me!" "It wasn't my fault! My body was destroyed!" "You look fine to me. It's your fault we're all but extinct, that the Andalites rule and that I am a monster! You, and you alone, for trusting that yeerk! For leaving me to be tortured and hiding in another dimension while your people died!" "That yeerk?" Niuk growled angrily. "Yakirsh. Do you not remember? You trusted her, she betrayed us, and then the Andalites came and destroyed us, because you would not protect us and you trusted that scum!" He smiled slyly for a moment. "I have my revenge against her, though. Her shadow is the same to me." He held out a small jar with a dead yeerk inside. Daroneasa turned away and sighed. "She changed, Niuk. She wouldn't harm us now, if she were alive." "Ha! And you're still a trusting fool! Well, in a few minutes, that will not matter. You'll be dead along with every human and Andalite in this city!" "Why? Why do you hate the humans?" His eye suddenly projected a hologram. Niuk was being dragged into a ship by Andalites. The face of Alloran, angry and insolent, ordering his fate. He was put in a small room. Suddenly, his flesh began to disintegrate, sending him into a pain such as no creature had ever felt. But he lived through the quantum virus somehow. Then he was on a table. Andalites were surrounding him, hurting him. An Andalite looked at him with triumph. < There. He should be unable to fight due to the chip in his brain, and we can use him as a tool. A spy or something. We have complete control over this one. > For years, Niuk's movements were controlled. His brain was his own, though. And he grew bitter, hating the Andalites and their allies. When not on a mission, he was kept in a rebel camp, where the ones who resisted the Andalites were held. He was tortured, along with the others. His only joy was his friend, Toby Hamee, a seer whom he loved very much. One night, he formulated a plan to escape. He removed the chip from the surface of his brain, by removing the eyepiece. It was painful, and he had trouble seeing and moving, but Toby and he managed to overtake a guard and make a run for it. The humans, though, found them. They killed Toby, shot her several times. She gasped for air and screamed while the Andalites and the humans laughed and kicked her and beat her until she was nothing but a broken body. Niuk could do nothing. He had lost control of himself. The damage to his nerve center was too great, and he collapsed, desperately trying to heal his wound, as Hork-Bajir can if they rest long enough, but he was not fast enough. He vowed that night to destroy the Andalites and the humans, no matter how long it would take, they would all pay for what they had

done to him and his love. The images stopped and Niuk blinked back a tear from his biological eye. " So you see, Daroneasa, what your cowardice caused?!" He said in a low, dangerous voice. "I have no will to live, only to see you and these humans and this city destroyed." "Niuk, please. They are innocent..." "It is war, and the innocent die in war." He snapped. " I...I didn't abandon you. I died." Niuk scoffed angrily. "Your lying knows no boundaries!" "It is true. My father was Tala Jamree. When he and his mate, a gargoyle from another dimension, had an egg, the creature inside was neither Hork-Bajir or Gargoyle. It was both. A creature who could change form, each one having a different consciousness, a different personality. An Ellimist realized what had happened, and he sent me to our world, and left my sister in her own. When the Andalites came, though, I died and was snapped into her body. We fought for control and nearly killed each other. Then, another Ellimist fixed this mistake by once again creating a new body for me. But this was years after you had been captured. I asked of you, but everyone said you were dead." Niuk growled. "I don't believe you." "Believe her. I am a chee, and I have been Daroneasa's friend since the K'glique war. I know of this other dimension. It's true." Ereka sighed. "Do you also know she abandoned her son there?" He growled. "That's what she does." "My son?" She asked, confused. "No! When the Andalites came, she thought that he and I had been destroyed. It was not her fault. Niuk, believe me!" Ereka cried, looking at the dying Specimen 42203.

Niuk blinked angrily, but then began to soften. "If...if this is true...then I have made a mistake." "No!" Nissa howled. "Yes. I will defuse the bomb." "Where is it?! I will not let you, if it kills me!" She launched herself at him, fighting and hissing in rage. The others drew back as Niuk knocked Daroneasa out of the way. The battle was long and bloody, and Daroneasa tried to forget what she saw that day. But when Ereka finally pulled them apart, Nissa was dead and Niuk was dying. Blood covered the room. Niuk's eyepiece had been pulled off and Daroneasa could see his brain behind the socket, exposed. She had seen the horrors of war, and this was not the first time she had seen such a horror, so she managed not to vomit. "Oh god..." Tommy said, reaching down to help him. He batted Tommy away with one hand, and he backed off. " I have wronged you all." He gasped, slowly typing a code into a keypad. There was no response. He lay back and blinked his remaining eye. "The only way to defuse the bomb is to kill me. Only I can detonate it, and it is void if I die. Kill me. I am in pain, please please kill me." "No, you'll be better!" Daroneasa lied. He would never survive with those injuries, but die slowly and painfully instead. "You lie. Even if my body healed, my hearts are always going to be broken. Please. For once, do for me what you could not before. Save me from this pain." Daroneasa nodded slowly, blinking back a tear. She reached down to her side and pulled out her dracon weapon and set it to maximum setting. " I'm sorry." She whispered. "I'm not. I finally will find peace." He said, nodding to signal her. As she pulled the trigger, a million images of pain and death and ,yes, love flashed through Niuk's mind. He held one image, though. That of Toby, smiling at him, her red eyes bright with love. Yes, that was the image he would hold if he lived until the end of time.

Chapter 15

Daroneasa staggered to Ereka, shaking and crying. Jiseka limped to her side, looking at Ajani, still crying in Heather's arms. Ereka looked

at them with pity, and began slowly. "When...when Nissa found out you were a nothlit, she created a clone of you, in order that one day you could regain your form." Daroneasa blinked a tear back and looked at Ajani. Obviously she didn't need to acquire new DNA. . Daroneasa dropped down at Specimen 42203's side. Her memory was new. But she had no idea who this was. She believed her child dead. Jiseka moaned, low and mournful as Daroneasa spoke. "Wha...what happened?" "Ax lost control. He..." Ereka stopped, looking at Daroneasa's face. She studied 42203's young scarred face and then looked at Ereka in surprise, the knowledge coming to her. "But this is impossible!" She whispered. "No. He lived But...he does not have long." Ereka looked at the ground. Daroneasa began to cry. "Oh, please don't cry." 42203 begged. "You hardly know me anyway. Keep fighting the Andalites for me. I wish I had survived to..." his voice failed him as he lost consciousness. Jiseka blinked, tears in his eyes. He watched his own son die, and there was nothing he could do. Specimen 42203 could not be revived. His breathing became shallow, slowing until it finally stopped. Daroneasa let out a long moaning howl, totally inhuman. "I have lost him twice!" She cried. She collapsed next to him, stroking his blond hair that was the same shade as her own, moaning quietly. Jiseka held her gently, also crying. The son he'd never known exist was dead. Why had she never told him? Why? To spare him from this pain? The agony of knowing that his child had died? It seemed her efforts had gone in vain. Daroneasa sobbed in Jiseka's strong embrace, crying out, though she knew not if she spoke to Jiseka or her son. "I'm sorry...so sorry..." BLAM! She screamed in horror. A hole in Jiseka's chest appeared. She felt her own chest sting from the bullet. "He, two birds with one stone." Daroneasa looked up to see the face of Ryan, emerging from the shadows, as she fell. Ryan was holding a gun, smoking from the shot. She was smiling. "Jis?" "I'm sorry, love. I...didn't know. I don't want to leave you..." "No, no, love. You won't die...you and I shall never leave each other's side again." she moaned, ignoring her own pain. But she knew he would die, and she would too. She could hear Heather and Desmond, yelling at their sister. She could hear them all. Ajani sobbing, Heather screaming in horror, Ereka trying to revive them. But they were the farthest from her mind as she focused on her love's face. His smiling face, which she would rather die to see for a moment than live an eternity without. "I love you..." he said with his last breath. Daroneasa no longer sobbed. Soon....very soon....the pain would be gone. She would be with Jiseka and her son... Thumpthud...thumpthud....her heart was slowing. She smiled as her vision faded. With her last breath, she spoke her last words to her only love. "I love you, too..." Thumpthud.....thumpthud..... Silence.

End
file.